

# Vedic Women's Educational Conditions and their Social Status

Santosh Kumar

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Dr. Ambedkar Government P. G. College, Unchahaar, Raebareli, (U. P.), India

**Abstract:** *In earlier times, Hindus considered education as a process of life. It was of belief of the ancient Hindus that education should prepare an individual to attain the main objectives of life like liberation, for living, for character formation (self-confidence, self-reliant and self-respect) and preservation of culture. Indian womanhood and their education have gone through socio-economic and psycho-spiritual changes. In Vedic period, according to A.S. Altekar, education was regarded as very essential to secure a suitable marriage". In Rig Vedic society "...the practice of child marriage did not exist". That is why, girls were able to study and education was given an utmost importance. Early Vedic family was of patriarchal type, but Vedic women had some control over the entire household. The patriarchal system never deprived the privileges and rights of the women. Vedic sacrifices were performed jointly by the husband and wife. Therefore, in Vedic period, women enjoyed equal status with the man.*

**Keywords:** Vedic women, social status, education, patriarchal

Indian education can be basically called as the product of the Aryan mind and aesthetic and vocational aspects were mainly inspired by the emotional and material nature of the Dravidians. The educational scenario of girls and women saw a change from Vedic (2000 B. C. to 1000 B. C.) to Post - Vedic (1000 B. C. to 200 B. C.) periods. The status of women was high in Indian society in the Vedic period. This paper has been written to know about the educational position of women in Vedic Period along with their social status.

In ancient times, education for Hindus was a process of life. It was considered as a way to prepare an individual to attain the main objectives of life like for living, for character formation and preservation of culture. Therefore, education was given to the women as it is directly related to the improvement of the society, economic prosperity, national solidarity, their social status and for good family relation. Indian womanhood and their education have gone through several changes. From 4th century B. C. to 3rd century B. C., girls and women were given education which helped them to acquire self - respect, self - confidence, and freedom. In Vedic period, a good education was provided to girls for their better future life. In the words of A. S. Altekar, "education was regarded as very essential to secure a suitable marriage". In the Vedic age girls had been given equal opportunity to study and they were not considered as the burden for the parents. In the ancient Vedic times women had all rights similar to men in studying the Vedas. Note that, study of the Vedas and shastras in ancient times in gurukuls is similar to schooling education in modern times. So denying this right to women in ancient times would have meant denying women the right to education. But as we shall see below, this was not the case. Women enjoyed equal liberty and freedom in their pursuit of knowledge in ancient India similar to men.

In Vedic society "...the practice of child marriage did not exist". That is why, girls were able to study and education was given an utmost importance. The essence of Aryan civilization has been mainly preserved in four Vedas (Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharvan). In the Vedic family and society was patriarchal, but Vedic women also had some position in

the entire household. The patriarchal system never deprived the privileges and rights of the women. There are few examples in which we can see the equal position of men as well as women. For example in the Vedic sacrifices rituals were performed jointly by the husband and wife. Therefore, in Vedic period, women enjoyed equal status with the man. The status and condition of women and girls were much better in Vedic period than today. If any women wanted to pursue education and knowledge they were allowed to do so without any social restrictions and constraints. They were not forced for early marriage. Most of the girls from well to do families also had the privilege to acquire education.

The Upanayana (initiation ceremony) were organized for both the girls and boys. During the Aryan period or poetical period, it can be rightly said that the education of women were not being neglected. There was never any kind of prejudices against women education and were a proper place in the society. Through the Vedas, it is clearly comes to the notice that the whole Aryans were collectively conscious about their upliftment of women. It was so because Aryans were mainly not aware or conscious about the gender power politics. Because at that time, society was not complex and it was in developing stage. The Vedic period has witnessed many women scholars and they were well - versed in sacred texts and Vedas. These women were masters in the various fields. They not only composed hymns but they also learnt music and dancing. The women who belonged to the lower strata or caste they had skilful and technical language like spinning, weaving and needle work.

In the Vedic period there were two groups of women - Brahnavadinis and Sadyodvahas. Brahnavadinis were the life - long students of philosophy and theology. Sadyodvahas used to prosecute their studies until they got married at the age of 15 - 16 years. Many educated women became teachers or Upadhyayinis. This has been mentioned in the texts like Madhava Samhite on Parashara Smriti, in Harita Dharma Sutra, etc. Some claim that Brahnavadini is just a wife of a daughter of a male rishi. But that is not what the texts define them as, nor does the very word Brahnavadini imply anything of that sort. Instead the word

actually implies knowledge of the Vedas. Madhava Samhite on Parashara Smriti says:

yopanayanam krutwa pashcad vivaham karoti sa  
brahmavadini |  
tathaiva ya prathamata upanayanam krutwa sadya eva  
vivaham vidhaya tato vedamadhite sa sadyovadhuh

Which means: She who studies Vedas after upanayana and then gets married is brahmavadini, she who gets married immediately after upanayana and then studies Vedas is sadyovadhuh.

There were many women poets and philosophers in Vedic period. The Vedic age has witnessed many capable and sagacious women like Apala, Ghosha and Visvavara, who used to compose mantras and were said to be rose to the rank of rishis or sages. Lopamudra, one of the female preachers of Vedic period, is believed to have preached as many as 179 hymns of the first book of the Rig Veda along with sage Agasthya. Katyayana in his Rigveda Sarvanukramani lists the 27 Rishikas as follows, saying these are the brahmavadinis or female Vedic scholars.

Therefore, it can be said that women were given equal opportunities in education along with the male ones to prove their capability and intelligence whether in the field of education or in any social customs and rituals. In pre - Vedic times also, women used to take part in religious activities and sacrifices along with their husbands. When formal education was given to the girls and women, they were required to utter 'Mantras' or verses so that it could help them to recite verses with very clarity and with correctness. Many women scholars of the Vedic period overcame many social constraints. In Vedic period, they were as equal as man in education and had surpassed men in their scholarly fields also. Apala, Atreyi and Ghosha are some of the renowned scholars of this period. Shri Madhvacharya in his *Mahabharatha Tatparya Nirnaya*, describes the scholarly nature of Draupadi, the wife of Pandavas as: Great women should study the Vedas like Krishnaa (Draupadi)

In richer families in this period, special teachers were mainly employed to teach various arts like toilet ointments, dancing, music, garland - making, painting, patching, sewing, and magic, composing poems and preparation of toys along with other arts. In some learned persons houses also, young girls could learn the lessons just by listening which were being taught to the young students. Therefore, we can say that there was a greater authority and honor in the position of the women in the Vedic society. They along with their husbands participated in social sacrifices, domestic ceremonies and feasts.

Thus, social morality was of comparatively high standard and social relations were maintained with mutual spirit and cordiality. We can say on educational status of the girls and women in Vedic period, were luckier and had the chance and privilege to choose their education and decisions of life in comparison to the other subsequent periods. So, we can compare a similarity between a Vedic women and modern day women in terms of education. Vedic women were given equal status in education and in the society along with the

male ones. Thus, we can say that Vedic Age or period is one of the rich and developed periods mainly for the upliftment of the educational status of the girls and women.

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